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Shumlin: Pownal came together to fix PFOA problem: Gov. Shumlin visits Vermont town to drink now safe water

By Derek Carson

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Berkshire Eagle (Mass.)

POWNAL, VT. — Governor Peter Shumlin visited Pownal on Monday to officially declare the town's water as being safe to drink.

Shumlin's office announced that the state was lifting the no-drink order on water from Pownal Fire District No. 2 last Thursday, after a newly installed filter proved to be successfully removing PFOA from the water.

"It was March when we got the bad news," said Shumlin, "Four months later, the people of Pownal can drink their water and know it's good and clean."

Shumlin spoke before members of the community and the press at the Pownal Rescue Squad. He commended the town for, "taking a tough situation and making it better."

"This community came together," he said, "and said, let's not get hysterical, let's get something done."

The granular activated carbon filter was installed by Unicorn Management Consultants earlier this month. The entire water system needed to be flushed before residents could drink the water. American Premier Underwriters (APU) agreed to pay for the filters.

On APU, Shumlin said, "They moved quickly. They wanted to help, they didn't put up roadblocks... APU has been fantastic about responding to our concerns."

Technicians for the state then tested 92 private wells around the villages of Pownal and North Pownal. Of those, seven had PFOA levels above the state's limit, between 22.7 and 66.2 parts per trillion. Levels were below 20 ppt in 12 wells. PFOA was not detected in 73 wells, according to the DEC.

PFOA, or perfluorooctanoic acid, is linked to cancers and other diseases. It's the same chemical that was found in Bennington and North Bennington, the Shaftsbury landfill, and in Hoosick Falls, N.Y.

Shumlin praised Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Alyssa Schuren, who has been working with the community since the chemical was first detected. "Do they come any better than Alyssa Schuren? No, they don't," he said.

For her part, Schuren thanked Shumlin, saying that he had been supportive and had given the DEC all of the resources they needed to solve the problem. "I have been so proud to work with you," she told the governor, "and I thank you for that."

Addressing the people of Pownal, Schuren thought back to the first meeting she had had with the community, when they announced the first test results. "The state didn't have many answers," she admitted, saying that they were still learning themselves, "But the one thing we promised that night was that we were going to find those answers together, and we were not going to leave Pownal behind. We have done that."

Pownal Rep. Bill Botzow said that he was lucky to have such a supportive delegation to work with on issues such as this one, including state Sens. Dick Sears and Brian Campion and Bennington Rep. Mary Morrissey, all of whom were in attendance for the event.

"We know we have more work to do," said Botzow, "but, as you know, our community really rises to the occasion. When something needs to get done, we come together and work together. That's the kind of community I want to live in."

Derek Carson can be reached for comment at 802-447-7567, ext. 122.

While Bennington Residents Learn How To Live With PFOA, Doctors Play Catch Up

By Howard Weiss-Tisman

Aug 1, 2016

Vermont Public Radio

The Department of Health is trying to get local doctors up to speed as hundreds of Vermonters, such as Coleen Healy, come to terms with the fact that they have elevated levels of the chemical PFOA in their blood.

People in Bennington County have been learning how to live with PFOA in their water. Now they're learning how to live knowing it's in their bodies.

State officials think emissions from the former Chemfab factory in North Bennington contaminated hundreds of private wells in southwestern Vermont with the suspected cancer-causing chemical.

The Department of Environmental Conservation has been testing private wells around Bennington, and almost 250 are contaminated with the suspected carcinogen.

And a few months ago, the health department held blood clinics to test the levels of PFOA in the people who've been drinking the contaminated water. Just last week, those people got their results back.

The average Bennington resident who's been drinking the contaminated water has between 10 and 20 micrograms per liter of PFOA in their blood. (The average American has about 2 micrograms per liter.)

Coleen Healy, whose well is the most contaminated, has 480 micrograms.

"I got a phone call on Friday and I said, 'OK, now what?' And they really don't know now what," she says. "She said, 'It doesn't mean you're going to get sick,' and I said, 'I'm already showing symptoms of being sick.'"

Just before the PFOA crisis hit, Healy had a routine physical. Her doctor said her thyroid was showing signs of distress and her cholesterol was high – both signs of PFOA poisoning.

So she's pretty freaked out.

"I'm very scared for my kids ... They were busy out there, playing in the sprinkler. Eating the food from our garden that we watered." - Coleen Healy

"I'm very scared for my kids," she says. "Just because they were Earth kids. They were busy out there, playing in the sprinkler. Eating the food from our garden that we watered and nurtured the seedlings in the water from our house. You know, that's my biggest worry. They're just kids."

Healy has two children. Her daughter also tested hundreds of times higher than average, and her son will do a blood test in November when he comes home from college.

PFOA has been used for decades; scientists thought it was safe, and so there haven't been a lot of tests done on how it affects the human body.

But now researchers are finding out that it's likely tied to a wide range of serious diseases.

So while doctors can tell Healy how much PFOA is in her blood, they can't really tell her very much more.

"It's scary," she says. "It's scary to call six internists in town and none of them know much about PFOAs ... It's like, no, we need to have somebody who knows about it."

The Department of Health is trying to get local doctors up to speed as hundreds of Vermonters come to terms with the fact that this dangerous chemical is in their body.

"There's probably a very steep learning curve in terms of health care providers knowing a lot about PFOA, because it is an emerging contaminant." - Sarah Vose, Vermont Department of Health

But Sarah Vose, who works for the Vermont Department of Health, says everyone is still learning about how the body reacts to this dangerous chemical.

"There's probably a very steep learning curve in terms of health care providers knowing a lot about PFOA, because it is an emerging contaminant," Vose says. "It's not a chemical that most people in Vermont knew a lot about before this contamination was discovered back in February."

Over time, if people stop drinking the contaminated water, Vose says the amount of PFOA will slowly go down.

And she says say people with high levels of the chemical in their blood should probably keep a close eye on the different health outcomes that are most strongly correlated with PFOA.

But there's no quick fix. There's no way of telling if the chemical will cause cancer or affect the immune system (though a federal panel recently upgraded its warning about the affects of the chemical), and there's no reassuring advice doctors can give to parents who are worried about their kids.

"I think people's reactions are what we anticipated," Vose says. "It can be very concerning to get these results and to not have a clear understanding of what this means for an individual's health."

And so people such as Jim Sullivan have to wait and see what happens.

"Who is going to ultimately pay for long-term medical monitoring for ourselves, and for everybody that's affected?" - Jim Sullivan

Sullivan lives right above the former Chemfab plant. His water's contaminated and his blood test showed elevated levels of PFOA.

Sullivan is trying to be pragmatic. He says he'll work with his doctor, and monitor the suspected health effects that are linked to PFOA.

But he's got some long-term questions.

"Of course one of the things that we're interested in is, who is going to ultimately pay for long-term medical monitoring for ourselves, and for everybody that's affected?" says Sullivan. "Because, this stuff, as you know, doesn't leave the system any time soon. And we have to stay on top of it, maybe the rest of our lives. So, it's a significant issue."

The state is negotiating with Saint-Gobain, the company that owned the North Bennington Factory, to have them cover costs associated with the contamination.

Sullivan is also involved with a class-action lawsuit against the company.

PFOA found in 2 wells near former Bedford landfill; 25 more to be tested

By KIMBERLY HOUGHTON, Union Leader Correspondent

August 1, 2016

Union Leader (New Hampshire)

BEDFORD — State officials are expanding their investigation into perfluorooctanoic acid after water contamination was recently discovered at the former Bedford landfill on Chubbuck Road.

Elevated levels of contamination have been detected at two wells immediately adjacent to the former landfill in Bedford, which was tested after water contamination was previously discovered at the former Merrimack landfill as well.

"It is truly unfortunate that residents in a fourth area of Bedford are being impacted by the evolving presence of PFCs in our drinking water," said Town Manager Rick Sawyer.

PFOA contamination has recently been detected in certain areas of Bedford, Litchfield, Merrimack, Amherst, Manchester and Londonderry. In Bedford, about 50 private wells

housed on Hemlock Road, Green Meadow Lane and Back River Road south of Smith Road have been receiving bottled water since the end of May when PFOA was discovered at levels above 70 parts per trillion — the state's standard.

Lower levels of contamination were also previously detected within the Cabot Preserve and Greenfield Farms areas of Bedford, which are serviced by public water from the Merrimack Village District.

Now, with new PFOA levels testing at 73 ppt and 84 ppt of PFOA next to the old Bedford landfill, 25 additional private wells will be tested for the contamination.

“Hopefully the fact that the findings adjacent to the landfill are significantly lower than those found in other sites being investigated in southern New Hampshire is an indication that the contaminants have remained on site,” said Sawyer.

The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services will now begin taking water samples from 25 private wells on Magazine Street, Spring Hill Road, Nathan Cutler Drive, Harvard Lane, Dartmouth Circle and Balsam Court, which are all located in the vicinity of the old landfill located behind the transfer station on Chubbuck Road.

According to Sawyer, the former landfill was in operation from the early 1970s through the summer of 1995, and was capped with an impermeable membrane in 1998.

“We will work with NHDES to ensure a complete investigation as expeditiously as possible, and continue to provide information on this issue ...,” Sawyer said in a statement.

He added that a separate well farther away from the two wells showing contamination near the old landfill detected a very low level of PFOA at 2.8 ppt, which could indicate that the contaminants have not migrated off the former landfill property.

Officials with DES said last month that 588 private wells have been sampled within a 1.5-mile radius of the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics plant in Merrimack, the likely source of contamination for some of the water problem in the region. Among those wells, 171 of them — or about 30 percent — are above the state standard for PFOA of 70 ppt.

In addition, the state is now providing bottled water to 480 properties in the region because of the water contamination. Furthermore, free blood testing is now being offered to residents who live near the Saint-Gobain facility who have private wells with PFOA contamination above 70 ppt.

The former landfill in Bedford is not within that vicinity.

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.. - See more at: <http://www.unionleader.com/PFOA-found-in-2-wells-near-former-Bedford-landfill;-25-more-to-be-tested#sthash.BVcT2ZSp.dpuf>

Erin Brockovich: Oakey groundwater contamination a huge problem

By Isobel Roe

Posted Tue at 5:13am

News Infinity (Australia)

The level of toxins in groundwater in the Queensland town of Oakey is concerning and there are potentially 30 more examples of chemical contamination "out there", American consumer advocate Erin Brockovich has said.

Residents in Oakey are meeting this evening to discuss taking part in a class action against the Federal Government, following the contamination of groundwater near the Oakey Aviation Base by a toxic firefighting foam containing the chemicals PFOS and PFOA.

It followed the release of a Defence Department report released last week which showed a contamination plume under Oakey will have spread another two kilometres in 100 years.

A Senate committee earlier this year was scathing of the Department, which had known the foam to be toxic as far back as 2003.

Ms Brockovich became renowned for her investigative and legal work after taking on US company Pacific Gas and Electric over water contamination in the small town of Hinkley, California.

She has since worked with law firms leading class actions in the US against companies that have contaminated water with PFOS and PFOA.

Ms Brockovich said the level of contamination in Oakey's groundwater, caused by PFOA and PFOS, was concerning.

"The greatest gifts we have are our land, our right to clean water and our health," she said.

PFOA is the same in the US as it is here. It's toxic there, it's toxic here.

"I can't tell you what to do, I can't tell you whether to be involved in a law suit.

"People are angry, they are fearful, they don't want to believe it. What is happening here is real."

Another report from Defence detailing the health risks in Oakey will be released later this month.

'I understand what they are going through'

Ms Brockovich, who is an ambassador for lawyers looking to represent Oakey residents, said she acted as a bridge between law firms and communities.

"I understand what they're going through, and I understand their fear, and I understand they won't always come forward," she said.

Ms Brockovich said the Australian Government must acknowledge the extent of the issue.

Contamination affects several other Australian Defence bases and has prompted the Government to promise blood-testing for affected residents, but the health impacts of the chemical remain unclear.

"There's potentially 30 more Oakeys throughout Australia," Ms Brockovich said.

"It's clearly important we have this conversation and we begin to take steps on how we're going to get there, what we're going to do and what prevention measures and monitoring we can do."

"The blaming has got to stop.

"It is what it is and how will we as a country, as a Government, make it safer?"

Class action potentially a 'very big issue' for government

For the past two years, Shine Lawyers has been representing affected residents and farmers in negotiating Federal Government compensation.

But partner Peter Shannon said it was now time to get a class action together.

"When the issue first broke we acted for about 50 landholders affected directly as a result of the bore contamination," he said.

"We were instructed not to institute. We saw it also as a community issue with [a] solution requiring a community solution.

"We were involved with extensive discussions with Defence and other parties and, ultimately, we come to the conclusion that if there is going to be any kind of discipline to those discussions is if there is a time pressure."
